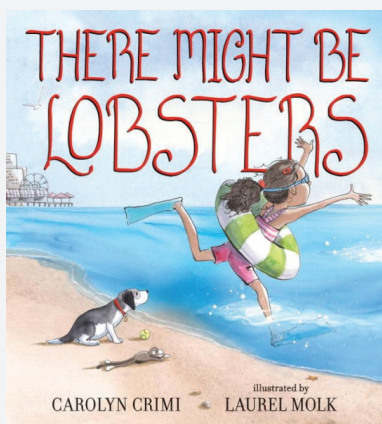


First Opinion: A Tail Wag for Overcoming Fears; Even if There Might Be Lobsters

Crimi, Carolyn. *There Might Be Lobsters*. Illustrated by Laurel Molk.
Candlewick, 2017.

Lakia M. Scott



Carolyn Crimi's *There Might Be Lobsters* is about a young beagle named Sukie who overcomes his fear and anxieties during a beach outing. Sukie is hesitant to do just about everything because of the potential harm or danger that could follow. He is led—more accurately, carried along—by a young girl (Eleanor), while his favorite sock monkey (Chunka Munka) happily follows in the journey.

Illustrated by Laurel Molk, the fine lines and use of watercolors provide the reader with a crisp, whimsical depiction of the story. The illustrations also provide some hidden insights that may spur further discussion among readers. For example, the book seems to be set in Coney Island, Brooklyn, where the ferris wheel, roller coasters, and New York skylines are prominently pictured in the backdrop. While there is no direct reference to this place, the reader can infer from the images about the diversity of characters presented throughout. We can also read about the illustrator's life and infer that she has set her story along the East Coast. In addition, the illustrations also provide subtle hints about lurking lobsters throughout—Eleanor's beach bag, specific colors and patterns used, and a few more obvious references are a great tie-in to the book's title and perhaps another geographical reference to the setting of the book. Finally, the drawings also represent a slightly comical feel when examining Chunka Munka's facial expressions and posture, as well as the positioning of others in the book. In this way, the author and illustrator seem to be excellently paired for bringing this story to life for others to enjoy.

Crimi shares in her biographical sketch that this story was inspired by her own dog's fear of the beach. In this sentiment, the story is written from a canine perspective that is cautious and careful as it attempts to capture what the scared pup may have been experiencing—both as a true-life story and as a fictional text. “But Sukie was just a small dog” is a reoccurring phrase that highlights his anxiousness to conquer perceived larger obstacles, such as the trek down the boardwalk, playing in the sand, or even getting into the beach water. However, when Chunka Munka is put in harm's way, Sukie's fears quickly subside in order to save him. In this instant, Sukie realizes that though he is quite small, he is also incredibly brave. The book ends with Sukie smiling, but still observing the sand and beach waves around him.

One of the most appealing attributes of the book is how the author localizes fear and anxiety through Sukie's thoughts and actions. Sukie's contemplation and reluctance throughout helps the reader to better understand his fears. This is also mirrored in the illustrations where one can note that Sukie's facial expressions outwardly concur with his thoughts about what he is experiencing. In a way, the character of Eleanor is deeply relevant because her response to Sukie does not provide much reassurance, but instead, gently forces him further into facing his fears. From a psychological perspective, Eleanor could represent peers who may not see the need for sensitivity when others feel fear or anxiety. This, too, presents a teachable moment for younger readers in that they can learn about empathy for others.

In conclusion, this book seems timely in that it will help to foster discussions about emotional health and well-being among young readers. In recognition that they are small like Sukie, they can still overcome obstacles if they are brave. And, like Chunka Munka, they can learn to be optimistic about life's uncertainties, even if there might be lobsters.

About the Author

Lakia M. Scott is an assistant professor of curriculum and instruction at Baylor University where she teaches social and cultural foundations courses to preservice teachers and graduate students. Her current research interests include creating and sustaining literacy programming for minoritized youth and increasing multicultural awareness and perspectives in diversity in teacher education programs. Like the author of this book, she too has an anxious pug (Puglsey) who lives cautiously and carefully behind his owner's shadow. She is also mother to two adventurous and tenacious boys (Chadley, age five, and Levyn, age one) who find joy in tackling their fears each day.